

## U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS REPORT 2011

### **COUNTRY REPORT: MAURITIUS (Tier 1)**

Mauritius is a source country for children and, to a much lesser extent, men and women subjected to sex trafficking within the country. Secondary school-age girls and, to a lesser extent, younger girls from all areas of the country, including from Rodrigues Island, are induced into prostitution, often by their peers, family members, or by businessmen offering other forms of employment. Young girls are sometimes sold by a family member into prostitution or forced into the sex trade in exchange for food and shelter. Taxi drivers are known to provide transportation and introductions for both the girls and the clients. Girls and boys whose mothers engage in prostitution are reportedly vulnerable to being forced into prostitution at a young age. Some drug-addicted women are forced into prostitution by their boyfriends, who serve as their pimps. In 2010, two Mauritian trafficking victims were identified in Europe: a man in forced labor in the United Kingdom and a woman in domestic servitude in Belgium. Approximately 300 Malagasy women reportedly transited Mauritius during the first half of 2010 *en route* to employment as domestic workers in Lebanon, where some were subsequently subjected to conditions of forced labor. Mauritius' manufacturing and construction sectors employ approximately 30,000 foreign migrant workers from India, China, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Madagascar. To date, there have been no confirmed reports of migrant workers subjected to conditions of forced labor within Mauritius.

The Government of Mauritius fully complies with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. Mauritius sustained its strong efforts to identify, investigate, and prosecute incidences of trafficking during the reporting period. The Mauritius Police Force maintained its offerings of anti-trafficking training programs for police officers and continued its awareness campaign in schools and villages. The government's efforts to coordinate among all relevant ministries, however, remained lacking, leading to inconsistent provision of protective and investigative services to trafficking victims.

**Recommendations for Mauritius:** Utilize anti-trafficking legislation to investigate and prosecute trafficking offenses and convict and punish trafficking offenders, including those involving adult women exploited in pimp-controlled forced prostitution; designate an official coordinating body or mechanism to facilitate improved anti-trafficking communication and coordination among the relevant ministries, law enforcement entities, working groups, and NGOs; increase protective services available to victims of child commercial sexual exploitation, particularly in regard to safe shelter and educational opportunities; provide increased funding and support to all branches of the Minors Brigade in the investigation of human trafficking cases; to improve the timeliness in deciding whether to prosecute trafficking cases, provide anti-trafficking training to personnel of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions; and ensure that all cases of children in prostitution identified by the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development, and Family Welfare's (MOGE) Child Development Unit (CDU) are referred to the police for investigation.

### **Prosecution**

The Mauritian government demonstrated increased anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts, vigorously investigating and prosecuting cases of human trafficking throughout the year. The Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act of 2008 prohibits all forms of trafficking for adults and children and prescribes penalties of up to 15 years' imprisonment for convicted offenders. In addition, the Child Protection Act of 2005 prohibits all forms of child trafficking and prescribes punishment of up to 15 years' imprisonment; the Judicial Provisions Act of 2008 increased the maximum prescribed punishment for child trafficking offenses to 30 years' imprisonment. All of the aforementioned penalties are sufficiently stringent and commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes.

From arrest to sentencing of offenders, cases of child trafficking typically took 18 to 24 months to resolve. The government did not report any successful prosecutions during the year. In early 2011, however, the Intermediary Court conducted two pre-trial hearings regarding the January 2008 case of a man and woman charged with inducing their 12-year-old niece into prostitution. In August 2010, police arrested a Mauritian man on charges of human trafficking for allegedly pimping a 15-year-old girl to a male client; the investigation remained ongoing at the end of the reporting period. In 2010, police concluded the investigation into a 2009 case of a male massage parlor owner suspected of pimping a 16-year-old girl and referred it to the Director of Public Prosecution (DPP) for action. A 2007 case of a grandmother who allegedly forced her granddaughter into prostitution, referred by the Minors Brigade to the DPP for action during the previous reporting period, remained under consideration by the DPP's office and had not been referred for trial. On Rodrigues Island, police referred seven alleged sex trafficking offenders to the DPP for prosecution in 2010. The Minors Brigade utilized a database for tracking criminal trafficking cases, as well as awareness campaigns carried out in the community; its work remains handicapped, however, by a lack of adequate funding and equipment. In 2010, the Minors Brigade provided basic anti-trafficking training to 359 police recruits as part of their entry-level police training curriculum.

## **Protection**

The government sustained its protection of child trafficking victims during the reporting period, providing funding to NGOs running shelters for victims of abuse on a reimbursable basis – \$6 per day for the protection of each child, including victims of trafficking. CDU officials regularly referred abused and exploited children to these organizations for shelter and other assistance. The Minors Brigade systematically refers all cases of identified children in prostitution to the CDU for victim assistance; in 2010, the brigade referred one such child, a boy, for protective services. The CDU did not, however, refer all cases of child prostitution identified by its officers to the Minors Brigade for possible investigation, as some victims or their relatives did not wish to press charges; however, the victims still received medical and psychological assistance provided by CDU. The government-funded, NGO-run drop-in center for sexually abused children, which provided counseling to five girls engaged in prostitution in 2010, advertised its services through a toll-free number and community outreach; its social worker continued to promote the services in schools and local communities. Nonetheless, due to the drop-in center's lack of shelter facilities and the often crowded conditions at NGO shelters, comprehensive protective services were not always readily available to all victims identified within the country.

Although the MOGE acquired land to build a residential center for victims of child prostitution in late 2008, fulfilling a requirement of the anti-trafficking statute, construction of the facility has not yet begun, as the MOGE awaits financial disbursement from the Ministry of Finance. As an interim measure, the MOGE completed the official paperwork to rent a house for use as a shelter until the construction is complete; this temporary shelter is scheduled to open in July 2011. The ministry operated a 24-hour hotline for reporting cases of sexual abuse; the hotline received three calls regarding cases of child prostitution in 2010. The Mauritian government continued to employ a formal protocol on the provision of assistance to all victims of sexual abuse; minors victimized in prostitution were accompanied to the hospital by a child welfare officer, and police work in conjunction with this officer to obtain a statement from the child victim. Medical treatment and psychological support were readily available at public clinics and NGO centers in Mauritius. The government encouraged victims' assistance in the investigation and prosecution of trafficking crimes, and ensured that identified victims were not inappropriately incarcerated, fined, or otherwise penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.

## **Prevention**

The government made notable efforts to prevent the sex trafficking of children and reduce the demand for commercial sex acts during the year. The Police Family Protection Unit and the Minors Brigade continued its widespread awareness campaign on child abuse and child rights at schools and community centers that included a session on the dangers and consequences of engaging in prostitution. The campaign targeted at-risk regions in the East and South coasts of the island and reached 28,643 persons in 2010, including parents, primary school children, high school students, and civil society members. Members of police units also discussed these topics on 19 radio programs during the year. Law enforcement and child welfare officials conducted surveillance at bus stops, night clubs, gaming houses, and other places frequented by children to identify and interact with students who were at a high risk of sex trafficking. In order to prevent potential child trafficking between mainland Mauritius and Rodrigues Island, the Passport and Immigration Office in February 2011 began requiring that children under the age of 18 obtain a travel document from their local police station when traveling between the two islands, and vice versa. The Ministry of Tourism, Leisure, and External Communications sustained its distribution of pamphlets to hotels and tour operators regarding the responsibility of the tourism sector to combat child sex trafficking. Communication and coordination among the relevant government ministries, however, was insufficient and hindered effective partnerships. Inspections conducted by the Ministry of Labor's 30 labor officers and nine trainee officers in 2010 yielded no cases of forced labor or exploitative child labor. The Ministry of Labor's Special Migrant Unit was responsible for vetting contracts, inspecting workplaces, investigating claims of poor working conditions, and following up on worker complaints; it did not provide specific information regarding corrective actions, such as the issuing of notices or fines, taken as a result of such inspections during the reporting period. The unit employed a Chinese interpreter to facilitate communication between the ministry and Chinese workers. In 2010, the government drafted Occupational Safety and Health (Employees' Lodging Accommodation) Regulations to set a minimum standard for lodging and other living conditions provided to migrant workers; the regulations entered into force in January 2011.